

**A short background brief to bring you up to speed on Written Declaration  
No.61, concerning Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania**

I write as a former member of the team led by the then High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoep, a mission with the aim of examining the possibility of transforming Babeş-Bolyai University into a multicultural and multilingual institution.

A summary of the state of play when we arrived in 1999: a Romanian-language and a Hungarian-language university existed in Cluj till 1959 when a coercive merger was put through by the ruling communists. After the fall of Ceausescu (1989), the Hungarian minority in Romania - numbering c. 1.5 million - made clear its aspiration to relaunch the autonomous Hungarian-language university, something that various Romanian governments have accepted in principle, but refused to implement in practice.

The High Commission's remit was to secure multilingualism on a fully equal footing at Babeş-Bolyai University. We made various recommendations, but these were never implemented by the University in the spirit of multiculturalism, so that equal status for the three languages (Romanian, Hungarian, German - the last is not controversial) never came into being. In reality, the courses taught in Hungarian invariably depended on the goodwill or otherwise of the Romanian majority in the Senate.

The exhibition that Babeş-Bolyai University put on last autumn in Parliament sought to demonstrate the university's commitment to multiculturalism, though not to multilingualism, making the entire enterprise something of a facade. A cursory glance at the photos showed that there was nothing to indicate a Hungarian presence at Babeş-Bolyai University.

As far as university autonomy is concerned, I was expressly assured by a high official of the university that this was very restricted and that the Romanian government took all the important decisions, including questions of the use of Hungarian. On the other hand, demands to make Babeş-Bolyai University genuinely multilingual are rejected on grounds of respecting its autonomy. Both cannot be true.

The demand for the restoration of the Hungarian-language university, therefore, has nothing to do with "ethnic separatism", but reflects the frustration of the Hungarian community in Romania at the failure of the Romanian state to respect the multilingual nature of Romania and to recognise that a monolingual multiculturalism is oppressive and undemocratic.

Yours sincerely

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